winter fire safety
tips for the home
fires
winter
federal emergency
management agency
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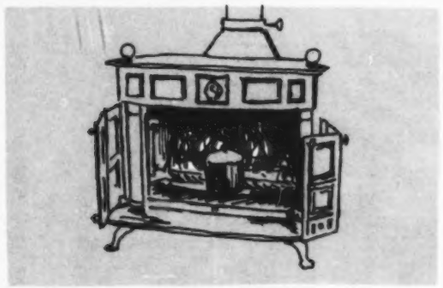
WINTER FIRE SAFETY TIPS FOR THE HOME

Americans facing an energy shortage are turning to alternate sources of home heating. The old pot-bellied and Franklin Stove market is suddenly zooming. Space heaters are selling rapidly, or coming out of storage. Fireplaces are burning wood and man-made logs. All of these supplementary heat measures can be good. But they can introduce the danger of FIRE into homes. The U.S. Fire Administration offers the following home fire safety tips:



ROOM HEATING

Space heaters and heating stoves are used throughout the nation to increase the warmth in rooms. They do the job, but can be dangerous. To use them safely:

- Never use fuel burning appliances without proper vents to the outside. Burning fuel (kerosene, coal or propane, for example) produces deadly fumes.
- Be sure your heater is in good working condition. All room heaters need frequent checkups and cleaning. A dirty or neglected heater is a critical fire hazard.
- Use ONLY the PROPER fuel for each heater. NEVER INTRODUCE A FUEL INTO A UNIT NOT DESIGNED FOR THAT FUEL.
- NEVER quicken a fire with kerosene or gasoline.
- Keep gasoline, or other flammable liquids stored OUTSIDE of the home AT ALL TIMES.
- Maintain adequate clearance in all directions around space heaters and heating stoves. (Surrounding surfaces should not become too hot for your bare hand.)
- Use a screen around stoves or space heaters which have open flames. Give the heater adequate clearance from walls and combustibles, such as a clothes rack, curtains, beds, or other furniture.
- If you use an electric heater, be sure your house wiring is adequate. Avoid overloading the circuit. Avoid overloading extension cords.
- Avoid using electric space heaters in bathrooms, and certainly do not touch one when you're wet.
- When refueling an oil unit, avoid overfilling it. If cold oil is used, it will expand as it warms up inside your home and may cause burner-flooding: this could cause flare-ups. And don't fill your heater while it is burning.
- Keep young children away from space heaters – particularly when they are wearing nightgowns which can be sucked in by a draft created by the heater and ignited.
- If you are using an approved, UL labeled space heater or heating stove in your bedroom, turn off your heater or turn it low before going to bed. When using a fuel burning heater in the bedroom, open the window. Ventilation prevents suffocation that can be caused by a heater consuming oxygen.
- Use ONLY safety listed equipment. If you choose an oil heater, look for the UL label; a gas appliance, the AGA or UL label; or an electric heater, the UL label.

FIREPLACES

When temperatures inside are kept down, a crackling fire in the fireplace is a cozy and cheery way to keep warm. But these fires, if not carefully tended, could cause tragedy. To use them safely:

- Do not use flammable liquids to start the fire.
- Keep a metal screen in front of your fireplace. Flying embers can start fires.
- Don't use excessive amounts of paper to build roaring fires in fireplaces. It is possible to ignite soot in the chimney by overbuilding the fire.
- Never burn charcoal in your fireplace, or in a charcoal broiler or hibachi unit inside. Burning charcoal gives off deadly amounts of carbon monoxide.
- Be sure no flammable materials hang down from or decorate your mantel. A spark hitting them from your fireplace fire could ignite these materials and cause a fire.
- When you go to bed, be sure your fireplace fire is out. NEVER CLOSE YOUR DAMPER WITH HOT ASHES IN THE FIREPLACE. A closed damper can help hot ashes build up heat to the point where a fire could flare up and ignite the room while you are asleep.

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●If your fireplace hasn't been used for some time, have it and the chimney checked before using.

●Follow the directions on the package if you use man-made logs. Never break a man-made log apart to quicken the fire.

FURNACE HEATING

It's important that you have your furnace checked out and cleaned regularly, and that it be in good working condition. Furnace fire safety tips need to be observed all year round. Some things you should know:

●Be sure all furnace automatic controls and emergency shutoffs are in good condition.

●Leave furnace work to experts. Don't attempt repairs unless you are qualified.

●Have the repair man check the wall and ceiling near the furnace and flue. If they are hot, additional insulation or clearance may be needed.

●Check the flue pipes. Are they well supported? Free of holes and clean?

●Is the chimney solid? No cracks or loose bricks? All unused flue openings should be sealed with solid masonry. Are they?

●Keep trash and combustible storage away from the heating system.

●Don't store hot ashes in the home; take them outside immediately.

KITCHEN STOVES

●Never use a gas range or an oven to heat your kitchen. Any unvented fuel burning appliance is capable of producing deadly levels of carbon monoxide.

●Don't leave lit oven doors open. Children could burn themselves on the heating elements.

MISCELLANEOUS

●Frozen pipes? Don't try to thaw them with a blow torch or other open flame. Use hot water or a UL labeled device for thawing, otherwise a fire could be the result.

●If windows are emergency exits in your home, train your family to use them in case fire should strike. And see that storm windows open easily.

●As an added safety feature, install a smoke sensitive home fire alarm, available at retail stores for $30-50.

●Contact your local fire department for advice if you have a question on Home Fire Safety.

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● Is there a fire hydrant outside of your home? If there should be a fire, firefighters need to be able to hook their hose up to that hydrant. Shovel the snow away from that hydrant. It may save your home, or that of your neighbors.

FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY
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